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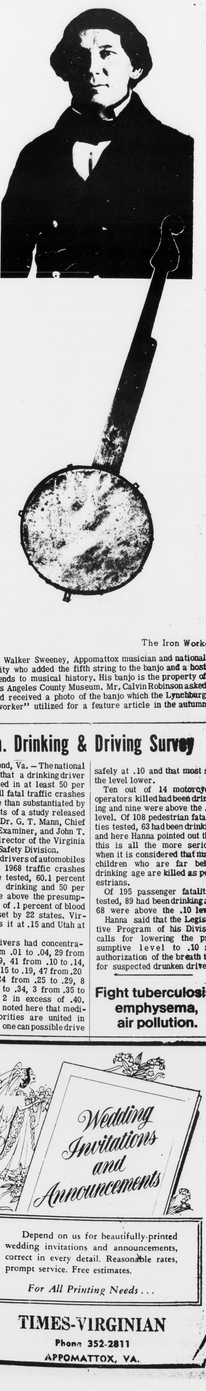
Magazine Features "Swinging Sweeneys"



The Iron Worker

Joel Walker Sweeney, Appomattox musician and national celebrity who added the fifth string to the banjo and a host of legends to musical history. His banjo is the property of the Los Angeles County Museum. Mr. Calvin Robinson asked for and received a photo of the banjo which the Lynchburg "ironworker" utilized for a feature article in the autumn issue.

"The Iron Worker", published quarterly by the Lynchburg Foundry Company, has once again focused attention of Appomattox in the publication of "The Swinging Sweeneys" by historian Burke Davis, a member of the staff of Colonial Williamsburg.

The ten pages and the cover of the autumn issue are devoted to "the lively five-string banjo" and its inventor, Joel Walker Sweeney, his brothers Sam and Dick and the rest of the neighborhood players who appeared with "old Joe's troupe" on the road.

Writes Davis, "Joe Sweeney is thought to have the first folk minstrel." He was an international celebrity and "among the first to distill the native musical genius of the American Negro into something like an art form. His gay comic renditions delighted large audiences through out the United States and Great Britian, and he once played a command performance for Queen Victoria.

Joe Sweeney grew up in the country side of what is now Appomattox. The Charles Sweeney cottage in Appomattox County where Joe, Sam and Dick Sweeney visited stands near Appomattox Court House National Historical Park. It is presumed that Joe, a bachelor, did not have a home of his own, but made the Charles Sweeney residence his headquarters when in Appomattox.

Calvin Robinson, retired editor of the TIMES-VIRGINIAN has always held great interest in the life of Joe Sweeney. He made available for the story a picture of the Sweeney banjo, now the property of the Los Angeles County Museum and the author of the article also took a picture of the Mr. Robinson's violin inscribed to Robert Miller Sweeney, Joe Sweeney's cousin and a member of his band.

While still in his teens Joe Sweeney "fashioned an old stringed gourd into an entirely new instrument" writes Burke Davis, and "young Sweeney was on his way." He played and sang for crowds in central Virginia improvising tunes, dancing, imitating animal sounds. Early successes were followed by tours of both south and north and national prominence as an entertainer. His command performance in England for Queen Victoria brought him even greater fame and fortune. Relic of that visit is a money belt, once filled with gold coins, given in appreciation of his command performance. The belt, treasured for years by DuVall Conner is now owned by his son J. W. Conner.

Although Joe Sweeney died before the Civil War his brother Sam who lead a band to entertain General J. E. B. Stuart.

According to records at the National Archives in Washington Sam Sweeney enlisted as a private in Company H (Appomattox Rangers), Second Regiment, Virginia Cavalry on January 12, 1862 at Centerville, Va.

Joe Sweeney is buried in Appomattox. A memorial stone, also pictured in the "Iron Worker" was placed in a field near the graves of Sweeney relatives on property once belonging to the Sweeneys and now owned by Mr. Wade Ferguson.

The memorial stone was erected in 1954 by Colonel C. H. Collins of St. Petersburg, Fla. Who did considerable research on Sweeney while he lived in Appomattox.

Previous articles devoted to Appomattox include one of the "General Store" by Lucille McWane Watson, a feature story on the Plunkett - Meeks Store.

Va. Drinking & Driving Survey

ichmond, Va. – The national ate that a drinking driver volved in at least 50 per of all fatal traffic crashes more than substantiated by esults of a study released by Dr. G. T. Mann, Chief al Examiner, and John T. , Director of the Virginia ay Safety Division.

386 drivers of automobiles in 1968 traffic crashes ere tested, 60.1 percent been drinking and 50 per were above the presumpevel of .1 percent of blood el set by 22 states. Virsets it at .15 and Utah at

drivers had concentrafrom .01 to .04, 29 from .09, 41 from .10 to .14, m .15 to .19, 47 from .20 , 24 from .25 to .29, 8 .30 to .34, 3 from .35 to nd 2 in excess of .40. ann noted here that medauthorities are united in no one can possible drive safely at .10 and that most set the level lower.

Ten out of 14 motorcycle operators killed had been drinking and nine were above the .10 level. Of 108 pedestrian fatalities tested, 63 had been drinking and here Hanna pointed out that this is all the more serious when it is considered that many children who are far below drinking age are killed as pedestrians.

Of 195 passenger fatalities tested, 89 had been drinking and 68 were above the .10 level.

Hanna said that the Legislative Program of his Division calls for lowering the presumptive level to .10 and authorization of the breath test for suspected drunken drivers.

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OAKVILLE

Rev. and Mrs. Hughes and son were dinner guests of Mr. and Mrs. Rob Lucado Sunday. Also her sister, Thelma of Gladstone. She returned home Monday after spending the holidays.

Mr. Lewis Moore entered the Lynchburg General Hospital Monday.

Miss Grace Hackworth and sister Lola Thomas of Lynchburg visited Mr. and Mrs. Clarke Moore Sunday. In the evening they visited Mrs. Clara Phelps, who has been sick for sometime.

The boys and girls around Oakville have returned back to college over the week end. We miss them.

"Lot Of Bird"

In Va. Wildlife

James Fred Elder, 12, and his brother, Bud, 8, were pictured in the January issue of the state's conservation magazine, "Virginia Wildlife" because of James kill of an 18 pound turkey gobbler last spring. The photo, originally run in the TIMES - VIRGINIAN was reproduced at the request of Ann E. Pilcher, editor of the "Youth Afield" section of the magazine. The boys are the sons of Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Elder, Appomattox, Va.

New Management

West End Esso, Rt. 460 west of the town of Appomattox is now under the management of Cliff Drinkard together with Jim Conner and Christian Litchford. They are available for all types of automobile care including road service.

COUNTY LINE

Supper guests of Mr. and Mrs. Elliott Nash Thursday night were Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Mann Keith and Tony, Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Howard, Mr. and Mrs. George Nash and Cheryl, Mr. Loyd Nash, Mrs. Shirley Kerr, and Dawn and Miss Amy Evans.

Miss Amy Evans spent Sunday in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Elliott Nash.

Cecil Nash left Sunday for Fort Lee, Va.

Supper guests of Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Mann Saturday night were Mrs. Henry Mann and Ryland, Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Howard, Mrs. Elliott Nash, Cecil Nash and Miss Amy Evans.

Miss Joyce Irby of Maryland, and Miss Anna Irby, of Georgia, spent the holidays visiting family and friends here.

Mr. Richard Nash and Winifred Nash visited in the home of Elliott Nash Thursday night.

Mr. and Mrs. Bob Miniates visited Mr. and Mrs. Henry Mann and Ryland and Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Mann and family Saturday.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Nash visited Mr. and Mrs. Ray Layne and daughter, of Lynchburg, Sunday afternoon and Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Gobble and Mr. Heran Guill, of Appomattox, Sunday night.

Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt Harvey visited Mr. W. T. Nash Sunday.

Mr. and Mrs. Richard Nash visited Mr. and Mrs. Bill Martin and Randy, Karen and Jeff Guill, of Lynchburg Wednesday night.

Mr. and Mrs. Bobby St. John and Mr. and Mrs. Emery Mullins visited Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Mullins and family Sunday.

Mr. Wilk Trent and Miss Rosiland Trent visited Mr. and Mrs. Vernie Jones Saturday night.

Mr. and Mrs. E. R. Ferguson visited in the home of Mrs. Winifred Evans Sunday afternoon.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Jordan visited in the home of Mr. Clifford Pillow, of Midway Sunday.

Mrs. "Bug" Carter and Miss Hilda Jones visited in the community Thursday.

We were sorry to hear that Mr. Curtis Mayberry is a patient at the McGuire Hospital in Richmond.

HISTORIC APPOMATTOX – 1845 – 1970

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